

Introduction

AMÉRICO PAREDES PUBLISHED his now classic work, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, in 1958, and a group of scholars—former colleagues and students of Paredes; let's call them “disciples of Paredes”—seized on this fiftieth anniversary of that august event to commemorate and celebrate his intellectual legacy and to assess its impact on folkloristics and related fields of inquiry. Paredes put forward a new way of thinking about folklore and provided a new orientation for the discipline, embracing social difference and contestation as central concerns. A witness to struggles played out in South Texas between people of Mexican descent and their Anglo-American invaders, Paredes was deeply aware of expressive culture as an arena of social struggle, and his studies of *corridos*, *coplas*, *décimas*, *casos*, and other traditional forms were embedded in a perceptive reading of power relations defining their contexts of production. Paredes, a native son of the border, naturally cast his gaze in two directions—northwards to the Anglo-American ascendancy, and southwards to Mexico and Latin America as the locus of cultural roots. His emergence from a border zone that was then (and remains today) a point of international conflagration conditioned him to appreciate deeply the factors that draw peoples together and set them apart and the ways that expressive culture enters into and shapes this process.

The disciples of Paredes assembled in Louisville were adequate in number to staff two excellent panels at the American Folklore Society meeting in October of 2008. From this larger group, I have collected six papers, each reworked and expanded from conference drafts. The panels' overall objective was to assess the vitality of the Paredes research agenda for folklorists and other scholars today, and to inspect the impact of his work in folkloristics and related fields of the social sciences and humanities. It is my hope that this sample from the AFS panels will convey the intellectual excitement and political purpose these panels exuded, and, in the process, further advance their ambitious and important objectives.

The original panels featured talks focused on two broad themes defining the Paredes legacy: expressive culture as an arena of social process and political confrontation, and the political context of research and scholarship. The focus on expressive culture is represented here by Richard Bauman's paper on the *décima* and in the talk Paredes gave at UCLA in 1981, “The *Corrido*,” transcribed and edited by María Herrera-Sobek.

Beverly Stoeltje's assessment of the cowboy as heroic figure provides a transition linking the two broad thematic areas. The second theme, the politics of scholarship, is highlighted in the papers by Olga Nájera-Ramírez on Paredes as a link to Mexico and Latin America, by Charles Briggs on the politics of circulation, and by George Lipsitz and Russell Rodriguez on the insurgent knowledge of Américo Paredes.

The papers gathered here, like the two Louisville panels, offer an excursion into the Paredes intellectual legacy that refines our understanding of his contributions even as it enriches our sense of intellectual genealogies and possibilities located squarely in folkloristics.